

Mud Creek Project EA Comment Period - Public Webinar

Questions and Answers

The Bitterroot National Forest hosted a public webinar about the Mud Creek Project draft environmental assessment (EA) on April 6, 2021. During the webinar, we received written questions from the public. We were able to verbally respond to most questions asked during the webinar. To listen to a recording of the question and answer session, please visit this [link](#). The video timestamp for the question and answer session is 0:42:08.

We did not have time to answer every question submitted during the webinar. The questions that we did not answer verbally are listed here. If you have additional questions, feel free to email them to seth.carbonari@usda.gov.

Question: *I have friends who live near the project area and see Golden Eagles fairly often. I don't think I saw any analysis about the impact of the project on Golden Eagles. Did I miss it, or was this impact not analyzed?*

Answer: Golden eagles currently are not listed as a threatened or endangered species, Forest Service sensitive species, or management indicator species, although they do fall under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Bald eagles were eliminated from detailed analysis due to design features and species needs as related to the proposed action. Golden eagles would fall under similar rationale. Please feel free to reach out or submit a comment regarding this issue.

Question: *Flammulated Owls really like Old Growth. I am concerned that Green et al.'s minimum is quite low. According to Linkhart and Reynolds, "Territories consistently occupied by breeding pairs were those containing the largest portion (more than 75 percent) of old growth (200 to 400 years) ..."*

Answer: While there is old growth in the project area and across the forest, the recent past owl surveys have not shown a significant population of owls in the Mud Creek project area. However, the implementation process does include wildlife surveys that must be completed in order for implementation to proceed. An implementation area must have owl surveys to identify owl occupancy. Design features with timing guidelines will protect any owl areas identified.

Question: *There is growing concern in places like Colorado as to the rising pressure by increased outdoor recreation on elk calf recruitment. With the valley growing in population and popularity, is this something that has been taken into consideration with trails placement, construction and future recreational use?*

Answer: Recent and more dated science has confirmed elk calf recruitment is closely linked to cow elk nutrition and forage availability. Some of the areas targeted for elk priority will rely on prescribed fire to increase forage productivity and palatability. The wildlife effects analysis report ([WILD-001](#)) discusses elk security, which is directly related to this issue. A comprehensive roads analysis was completed, which included effects to elk and elk security. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks has also been helpful in providing support to address these concerns.